Selection of Leading Cases

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LAW OF REAL PROPERTY

Supplementary Cases

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v.

PEARA SAHEB.

[Reported in I. R. 32 I. A. 244 s.c. I. L. R. 33 Cal. 116 P.C. =9 C. W. N. 938.]

J. C. 1905. July 5.

The judgments of their Lordships was delivered by

Sir Arthur Wilson.—This is an appeal from a judgment and decree of the High Court in Calcutta, dated August 6, 1903, which reversed the previous judgment and decree of the Subordinate Judge of the 24-Pergunnahs dated March 4, 1901.

The controversy between the parties relates to the estate of a Mahomedan lady known as Khas Mahal, who was the principal widow of the late ex-King of Oudh, and who died on April 1, 1894. About the facts which have to be considered there is no longer any controversy. The respondent, shortly known as Peara Saheb, was a distant relation of the ex-Queen. About the year 1881 he entered her service, in which he continued to the date of her death. He acquired her confidence in the highest degree, and became the head of her household and the manager of all her affairs. While occupying that position he received from her by way of gifts a large amount of property, in fact, substantially the whole of the property possessed by her which yielded any income.

On November 12, 1891, the lady executed a deed of release in the following terms :—

"I, of my free will and accord and without inducement and temptation exercised by any body, do declare that Nawab Peara Saheb, who is a near relation of mine, has pleased me with his good behaviour and services; and (his services) have afforded me much relief. The gift of things which I have from time to

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time made to him from the time of his connection with the management of my affairs down to the present time, have been made out of my natural affection for him and in recognition of his good and loyal services; and the cash and the things which I have given him have not been kept with him by way of deposit or trust or given as loan, and I and my heirs and representatives neither at present have, nor in future shall have, any right to get the same back or make demand for them. I further declare that the account of the cash and things and kind that up to the time of execution of this deed have been made over to him for my own personal use, is not to be rendered or made up by him, and that I have kept with myself alone accounts and *taddil* of all kinds, and that I look after my *jemma kharach* (income and expenses) personally, and keep the account thereof with myself. The items which he has applied to his own uses, or which are with him, are those very items which I have out of my affection for him and in recognition of his services given him and allowed him to make use of after due deliberation. If I or after me my heirs and representatives prefer claim or demand against him in respect of the gifts and accounts, and *taddil* and things and cash given, then it shall be considered null and void according to Shara (Mahomedan law) common usage and law. These words have therefore been written in the shape of a deed of release and acquittance and safinama, and after the completion of the necessary formalities delivered to him, so that it may serve him the purposes of an authority."

On June 30, 1893, the lady made her will, by which she appointed the Administrator-General of Bengal to be her executor if he should be willing to act, and if that officer should decline to act she appointed Peara Saheb.

In paragraph 2 she said:—

"I have from time to time made gifts of money and cash to the said Nawab Peara Saheb, and on the 12th day of November, 1891, I executed a safinama in his favour which has been duly registered. I have also by a deed of trust dated the 15th day of February, 1893, duly registered dedicated certain property therein described for religious and charitable purposes. I confirm these transactions."

The respondent's influence over the lady continued unabated down to her death, and there is no evidence that at any time during the course of her dealings with him she had the advantage of any separate and independent advice. From the evidence in this case he appears to have taken a prominent part in arranging the provisions of the will, and to have given instructions to the attorney who drafted it.

When the lady died she left surviving her as her sole heirs (according to the Shiah law by which the family was governed) two grandchildren. Their title as heirs was denied by the lady herself in her will, and after her death was persistently contested by those who were interested in denying that title. Their right of inheritance has, however, been finally established.

Soon after the death of the testator the Administrator-General, having been put in motion by Peara Saheb and acting under an indemnity from him, applied in the High Court for probate of the will. The grandchildren as heirs entered a caveat. Their right to appear as caveators was disputed, but was ultimately established.

The proceedings with reference to the probate then went forward, and on July 2, 1900, the learned judge who heard the case pronounced in favour of the will. The probate accordingly issued, dated August 30, 1900. It further appears that there was an appeal against that decision, and that the appeal was dismissed.

While the probate proceedings were pending, the present suit was instituted on March 26, 1897, in the Court of the Subordinate Judge of the 24-Pergunnahs. The plaintiffs were the two grandchildren of the testatrix and another person to whom they had assigned a portion of their interest. The first plaintiff is now represented by the first group of appellants, and the other plaintiffs are appellants. The defendants to the suit were Peara Saheb (respondent in this appeal) and the Administrator-General. The plaint stated the confidential relations which had existed between Peara Saheb and the lady, and alleged that Peara Saheb had misused his position of confidence, and thereby become possessed of the bulk of her property; and the material part of the prayer was to the effect

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that Peara Saheb should be compelled to account for the property which had thus come into his hands, and should be declared to be a trustee for the plaintiffs. The written statement of Peara Saheb denied the case alleged in the plaint. Issues were settled of which it is only necessary to notice, for the present purpose, the 7th, 8th, and 9th:—

"7. Is the deed of release relied upon by defendant No. 1 genuine? Was the said defendant the confidential agent of, or in a fiduciary relation to, the late Khas Mahal as alleged in the plaint? Is the release bad on the ground of undue influence? Is it a fact that any of the properties in suit were obtained by undue influence or while defendant was in a fiduciary relation from Khas Mahal? Does the release bar the present plaintiffs?

"8. Is defendant liable to render an account? If so, to what extent and in respect of what properties?

"9. What properties, if any, belonging to Khas Mahal deceased were removed or received by defendant No. 1 or otherwise came into his possession either with or without her consent, and is he liable to render an account in respect of the same or of any and, if so, for what portion thereof, and to restore any, if so, for what portion thereof?"

The Subordinate Judge delivered his judgment on March 4, 1901. He held that Peara Saheb had occupied a position of confidence, and had obtained the property in question by the exercise of undue influence, and that the alleged release was not genuine and not binding.

Before the time at which this judgment of the Subordinate Judge was delivered, the decision of the High Court establishing the will had been passed. It was necessary for him, therefore, to consider the effect of that decision upon the case before him. His view was that "the judgment of the High Court in the probate case conclusively proves that the Administrator-General is the executor under the will of Khas Mahal. It does not conclusively prove that all statements in the will are true." And he held that statements relating to the transactions with Peara Saheb and the release to him were not true. In the result he made a decree in favour of the plaintiffs.

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On appeal to the High Court, that Court on August 6, 1903, held that the probate proceedings were conclusive of the questions arising in the present case.

The learned Judges said :—

"The will was strongly contested by the present plaintiffs Nos. 1 and 2 when probate was applied for by the Administrator-General of Bengal, and the probate proceedings were pending during the trial of the present case in the Court below, judgment being delivered on the 2nd of July, 1900, and probate issuing on the 30th of August in the same year. The decree now appealed against is dated the 4th of March, 1901. The Administrator-General of Bengal applied for probate on the 14th of May, 1894, and a caveat was entered by the plaintiffs Nos. 1 and 2 shortly afterwards. In the probate suit substantially the same issues were raised as in the present case. The caveators set up that Khas Mahal was physically and mentally incapable of giving instructions for the will or of understanding the will, that she was unable to understand the nature of the dispositions contained in the will by reason of her feebleness of body and mind, and that the will was prepared and executed under the undue influence of the defendant Peara.

"Sale, J., sitting on the Original Side of the High Court held, however, that the caveators had absolutely failed to make out their case. He was satisfied that the lady did give instructions for her will, that she thoroughly understood its contents and executed it as a free agent, and not under the influence or ascendancy of Peara, and with full testamentary capacity, and probate was accordingly granted. The present plaintiffs Nos. 1 and 2 appealed against that decision, but the appeal was dismissed with costs. There was no further appeal from that decision.

"We must take it, then, for the purpose of the present discussion, that the lady thoroughly understood the purpose and effect of her will and that it was her voluntary act, and that she was of full testamentary capacity to make the will, and in that will she expressly confirms this release."

They therefore reversed the decision of the First Court, and dismissed the suit with costs. Against that decision of the High Court the present appeal has been brought.

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In the course of the argument before their Lordships the questions for decision became greatly simplified. It was admitted on behalf of the respondent that, apart from the will, the release and the other transactions between Peara Saheb and the lady could not have been supported. It was not disputed—indeed it could hardly have been disputed—that, upon the evidence in the present case and apart from the alleged effect of the probate and the proceedings which led up to it, the respondent could not have relied upon the confirmation of the earlier transactions contained in the will. The appeal was resisted solely upon the legal ground that the appellants are estopped by the probate, or by the proceedings which led to the issue of the probate, from denying the validity of the confirmation which the will purports to contain of the transactions between Peara Saheb and the testatrix during her lifetime, and particularly of the release alleged to have been executed by her. The correctness of that contention is what their Lordships have to consider.

The estoppel was rested upon two distinct grounds which must be considered separately. First, it was said that the matters now in question were *res judicata* under s. 13 of the Civil Procedure Code; and, if their Lordships rightly understand the case, that is the ground upon which the learned Judges in the High Court disposed of the case. Sect. 13 enacts that "no Court shall try any suit or issue in which the matter directly and substantially in issue has been directly and substantially in issue in a former suit between the same parties, or between parties under whom they or any of them claim, litigating under the same title . . . . and has been heard and finally decided by such Court."

It was contended that the probate proceedings were opposed as caveators by the first and second original plaintiffs, of whom the second is now an appellant, while the first is represented by the first group of appellants, and the third plaintiff-appellant claims under the others; that in those proceedings the questions were at issue whether the will had been executed under undue influence, whether that will represented in its entirety the free and independent intention of the testatrix, and therefore whether the confirmation which it purports to

contain of the previous gifts and release was a valid testamentary disposition.

Several objections have been raised to the estoppel so set up.

First, such an estoppel can only arise from a decision in a former suit between the same parties, and it is contended that in the present instance this condition is not fulfilled. The former proceedings were between the Administrator-General, who propounded the will, and the present appellants or those whom they represent, though it is true that the Administrator-General was set in motion by the present respondent and acted under his indemnity. For reasons which will be stated their Lordships think it unnecessary to consider this point.

Secondly, to give rise to an estoppel not only must the former suit have been between the same parties as the latter; it must also have raised the same issues. It was argued for the appellants that assuming the issues raised in the probate proceedings to have been precisely what the High Court in the present case understood them to have been, the issues in the present case were not the same, because in the present case, in order to validate the confirmation by the will of the release and other transactions, it was necessary to show, not only that the testatrix knew and intended what she purported to do by her will, but also knew what her actual rights were in respect to that release and those transactions, and knew them to be invalid and not binding upon her—a matter which it was said did not and could not arise in the probate proceedings. This seems to present a serious difficulty in the way of the respondent.

But their Lordships think that the contention of the respondent under s. 13 fails upon another and a simpler ground. The respondent is relying upon a bare legal difficulty to resist a case to which there is no substantial answer on the merits. He says that the questions now in issue were formerly in issue in the probate proceedings. How can their Lordships tell that? Those proceedings are not in evidence, as they ought to have been in order to support such a case. There is a petition for probate and the probate itself. There is mention of a caveat and of an affidavit in support of it. There are two judgments delivered at different stages, and there is mention

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of a decision on appeal. One of the judgments of the learned judge shows clearly enough what he understood to be the questions for decision, but that is not enough. Their Lordships cannot give effect to the estoppel contended for unless they can say for themselves that the matters now in ssue were in issue in the probate proceedings. Whether any issues were settled in those proceedings or the points in dispute were otherwise formulated does not appear, nor do the terms of any decrees or orders made therein. Their Lordships, therefore, think that the alleged estoppel under s. 13 fails, because in the absence of the probate proceedings there is no sufficient evidence to support it.

The second ground of estoppel rests, not upon the probate proceedings or any issues raised and decided in the course of them, but upon the effect of the probate itself. This gives rise to a question of some general importance, and for the purpose of determining it it seems to make no difference whether probate has been obtained in common form and *ex parte* or after opposition.

The question thus arising seems to depend upon the terms of the Probate and Administration Act (V of 1881). Sect. 4 of that Act says that "the exècutor or administrator, as the case may be, of a deceased person is his legal representative for all purposes, and all the property of the deceased person ve ts in him as such."

Sect. 88 gives to the exècutor or administrator power to sue in respect of causes of action that survive the deceased and to recover debts; s. 90 gives an executor or administrator large, but not unlimited, powers of disposition; s. 12 says that probate when granted establishes the will from the death of the testator; and s. 59 says that—

"Probate or letters of administration shall have effect over all the property, movable, or immovable, of the deceased..... and shall be conclusive as to the representative title against all debtors of the deceased, and all persons holding property which belongs to him, and shall afford full indemnity to all debtors paying their debts, and all persons delivering up such property to the person to whom such probate or letters of administration shall have been granted."

The title thus conferred upon every executor who has obtained probate is obviously convenient, as tending to facilitate the administration of the estate of the deceased and the adjustment of the rights of all parties connected with it. But in the case of every Mahomedan will it establishes a somewhat peculiar state of things.

A Mahomedan testator has not an unlimited power of disposition by will: he can only deal with one-third of his property; the remaining two-thirds pass to his heirs whatever the terms of the will may be. Thus the executor, when he has realized the estate, is a bare trustee for the heirs as to two-thirds, and an active trustee as to one-third for the purposes of the will; and of these trusts one is created by the Act and the probate irrespective of the will, the other by the will established by the probate. There are thus two trusts for different sets of persons of different properties and based upon different titles. And this state of things does not arise from any accidental conflict of laws such as gave rise to a somewhat similar complication in the case of *Concha* v. *Concha*,[1] but by the deliberate action of the Legislature. In giving effect to a system of so peculiar a nature as that described their Lordships think it necessary to proceed with great caution.

The Act in question applies only to persons to whom the Indian Succession Act (X of 1865) did not extend—that is to say, Hindus, Mahomedans, and Buddhists. And, though the sections relating to probate in the Probate and Administration Act are substantially taken from the corresponding sections in the Succession Act, it must be observed that the last-mentioned Act, while to a large extent embodying the rules of the English law, yet departed in many particulars from those rules, and was not only made applicable to persons of European descent, or those to whom the system derived from the Ecclesiastical Courts might naturally be applied, but was made the law for all persons in British India other than Hindus, Mahomedans, and Budhhists, including, for instance, the Parsees, who form so important a part of the community in some districts of India.

[1] 11 App. Cas. 541.

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Testamentary jurisdiction was first given to the Supreme Courts by their original charters—that in Bengal dated in 1774 being the first.[1] And it was then given as a branch of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and was to be administered according to the ecclesiastical law as in force in the Diocese of London. In the course of the series of events by which the British territories in India grew from a group of trading settlements into an empire various branches of jurisdiction, which sprang originally from an ecclesiastical origin, have come to be applied by a number of legislative acts to new territories and new classes of persons, and administered by new tribunals. And in the progress of this development the ecclesiastical origin of such jurisdiction has been completely discarded, and the Legislature has gradually evolved an independent system of its own, largely suggested, no doubt, by English law, but also differing much from that law, and purporting to be a self-contained system. Even in the case of the High Courts, the successors of the Supreme Courts (which alone possessed ecclesiastical jurisdiction), the testamentary jurisdiction which the charters purport to confer upon them is not given as a branch of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and is not made dependent upon the law administered by English Courts.

From an early date the Supreme Courts granted probates of Hindu and Mahomedan wills.[2] The practice varied greatly from time to time, and it was never perhaps very satisfactorily determined upon what basis the jurisdiction rested. It was, however, established that such probates might issue. But the Supreme Courts never applied the English rule as to the necessity for probate to Hindu or Mahomedan wills, nor did they attribute to such probates when granted the English doctrines as to the operation of probate. Under that system a Hindu or Mahomedan executor took no title to property merely as such by virtue of the probate. In the case of Mahomedan executors such a title was created for the first time by the Probate and Administration Act.

These considerations seem to their Lordships strong to shew that the effect of probate of a Mahomedan will granted after

[1] Printed in 2 Morley's Digests, p. 549.

[2] See *Bebee Mattra's Case*, (1832) Morton, 75; also reported in Clarke's Rules and Orders, p. 119.

the Probate and Administration Act must be that which is given by the terms of the Act itself, neither more nor less. What, then, is the effect of the Act? Sec. 4, supplemented by s. 88, vests the whole property of the testator in the executor. Sect. 59 makes the probate conclusive as to his representative title against debtors of the deceased and persons holding property of his, and gives a complete indemnity to those who pay debts or deliver up property to the executor holding the probate. Those enactments appear to their Lordships incapable of being applied so as to give to the probate in the present case the effect contended for. The appellants do not in this action contest the title of the executor, though they shew that, as to two-thirds of the estate, he is a mere trustee for them. They are not debtors of the estate, nor possessed of property belonging to it. They are not interested under the will, nor do they (necessarily) contest the validity of the will as a beneficial disposition to the legatees, and other persons claiming under it, of that part of the property of the testatrix which she could dispose of by will. But they say that they are entitled to two-third parts of all the property of the testatrix which was not effectually disposed of by her in her life-time. It is now admitted that the release was ineffectual for that purpose, and, if so, the money and other property in the hands of Peara Saheb was in the disposition of the testatrix at the time of her death. As she could not dispose of more than one-third part of it by her will, the confirmation of the release could not confirm Peara Saheb's title in more than that one-third, and the appellants are entitled to the other two-thirds. The controversy is between the heirs claiming adversely to the will and a person who claims a beneficial interest under the will, and the provisions of the Act which have been cited seem to their Lordships to create no estoppel in such a case. They are, therefore, unable to concur with the learned judges of the High Court in thinking that the suit ought to be dismissed.

It remains to consider what the decree ought to be.

The plaint, after alleging the position of the respondent with reference to the lady, went on to state that he had obtained from her jewellery, money, and other property. But the latter statement was naturally made only in general terms.

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The written statement admitted the receipt of jewellery which realized Rs. 30,000 or thereabouts, and of sums of money the amount of which was not given, but said to have been invested in "Government of France promissory notes." The ninth of the issues settled for trial raised the question of how much the respondent had received and ought to account for. At the trial these questions of amount were fully gone into, and the respondent, who was examined, had every opportunity to shew what he had received and what he had done with it, and to prove, if it were possible, any credits which ought to have been allowed to him on the other side of the account. He could give no satisfactory account of what he had done with the moneys received by him, or of the transactions between him and the testatrix, nor did he assert that any credits should be given to him, so that at the trial the account was taken as far as it was possible to take it, and it was shewn that no further account could be obtained. The Subordinate Judge held that it would be idle to direct any further account to be taken, and gave a decree against the respondent for the amounts of which he admitted the receipt, with interest.

In the course of the argument before their Lordships the learned counsel for the appellants admitted that his clients were interested in the estate to the extent of two-thirds only, and intimated that they would be content with a decree upon this footing.

Their Lordships are satisfied that no injustice can have been done by the Subordinate Judge by reason of the principle upon which he proceeded in framing his decree, but they think, for the reason just stated, that the present appellants can claim only two-thirds of the amount awarded by the First Court.

Their Lordships will humbly advise His Majesty that the decree of the High Court should be set aside with costs, and the decree of the Subordinate Judge affirmed, with the modification that the amount awarded to the appellants be reduced by one-third, and that any alteration which this may entail in the amount of costs ordered be made.

The respondent will pay the costs of this appeal.

Solicitor for appellants: *W. W. Box.*

Solicitors for respondent: *Gush, Phillips, Walters & Williams.*

NOTE.

Besides the question of estoppel we have in this case a short history of the testamentary jurisdiction of the old Indian Supreme Courts and their present day successors the Indian High Courts. The following three points have also been discussed, *viz.*, (*i*) personal application of the Indian Succession Act (X of 1865) and the Probate and Administration Act (V of 1881); (*ii*) Interpretation of Secs. 4, 59 of the Probate and Administration Act; (*iii*) effect of Probate of a Mahomedan will granted after the passing of the Probate and Administration Act. The executor of a Mahomedan will takes the whole of the estate by virtue of the provisions of the Probate and Administration Act. But when he has realised the estate, he is a bare trustee as to the two-thirds, for the heirs, whose rights a Mahomedan testator cannot defeat by will. As to the remaining one-third he is an active trustee for the purposes of the will and holds it subject to the disposition, if any, of the will. See also *Basir Ali* v. *Hafiz Nojir Ali* (1908) 13 C. W. N. 153, 158. See also *Development of Law of Testamentary Power of Hindus in Bengal* (1915) 22 C. L. J. 6n—8n.

SAILAJA PROSAD CHATTERJEE AND OTHERS

v.

JADU NATH BOSE.

[*Reported in 21 C. L. J. 88 s. c. 19 C. W. N. 240.*]

The Judgment of the Court was delivered by

1914. May 13.

MOOKERJEE, J.—This is an appeal by some of the defendants in a suit to enforce a mortgage security. The substantial question in controversy between the parties is, whether the mortgage is operative upon the property now in the hands of the appellants. The circumstances under which the mortgage was created are not in dispute at this stage and may be briefly stated. The property formed part of the estate of one Durgadas Chatterjee who made a testamentary disposition on the 6th April, 1885. The testator died in 1890, and on the 8th December of that year probate was granted to his eldest son Annada Prasad Chatterjee who was named as the executor in the will and figures as the first defendant in this litigation. On the 20th February, 1894, the widow of the testator and one of his grandsons, who are the second and third defendants respectively in this suit, applied to the probate Court for removal of the executor on the ground of his misconduct and for revocation of the probate issued to him. On the 19th July, 1894, the probate was revoked and the appointment of the first defendant as executor was cancelled. On the 17th August, 1894, the probate Court appointed the widow and the grandson as joint administrators and four days later issued to them letters of administration (inaccurately described in the order sheet as "probate") with copy of the will annexed. On the 10th September, 1894, the executor whose appointment had been revoked, lodged an appeal in this Court against the order of the District Judge. On the 31st July, 1896, the appeal was allowed and the order of the District Judge reversed on the ground that the alleged misconduct and mismanagement did not constitute a just cause for removal of an executor under clause 4 of section 50 of the Probate and Administration Act. *Annoda Prosad* v. *Kalikrishna*.[1] Thereupon, the probate

[1] (1896) I. L. R. 24 Calc. 95.

originally issued to him, which had been recalled and cancelled, was re-issued to him by the District Judge on the 19th February, 1897, pursuant to an order made in that behalf on the 11th February, 1897. Meanwhile, on the 26th April, 1895, in execution of a decree for money against the executor, the disputed property was sold and was purchased by Pitambar Chatterjee, now represented by the appellants. The decree had been obtained by a co-proprietor of the estate in a suit for contribution in respect of revenue payable to Government by all the proprietors. The administrators, who were in possession of the estate at the time of the sale, applied to the District Judge on the 4th May, 1895, for permission to raise money by mortgage of part of the estate with a view to have the sale set aside under section 310A of the Civil Procedure Code of 1882. They represented—and the accuracy of their statement has not been called in question—that the property was worth more than Rs. 1,000, and that if the sale, which had taken place for Rs. 495 only, was allowed to stand, serious loss would result to the estate. The District Judge sanctioned the mortgage and directed that the very property, which would thus be saved, be given by way of security. The plaintiff thereupon advanced Rs. 550 to the administrators who applied the money for cancellation of the sale, and on the 21st May, 1895, executed in his favour the mortgage now sought to be enforced, by which they undertook to repay the loan on the 12th April, 1896. On the 21st April, 1898, *i.e.*, after the executor had been restored to his office as the result of the appeal to this Court, the disputed property was sold in execution of a money decree against him as executor of the estate and was purchased by the decree-holders who subsequently transferred the same to Pitambar Chatterjee, predecessor of the present appellants on the 29th December, 1898. On the 9th April, 1908, the plaintiff commenced this litigation to enforce his security and he joined as defendants eleven persons, namely, the executor as the first defendant, the administrators as the second and third defendants, and the representatives of the purchaser as the remaining defendants. The claim was contested by the last-named defendants only, on the ground that the mortgage was inoperative, because granted by administrators erroneously

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appointed as such. The Courts below have concurrently overruled this defence, and have decreed the suit. On the present appeal, the decree of the District Judge has been challenged on two grounds, namely, *first*, that the mortgage granted by the administrators does not bind the estate, and, *secondly*, that as the provision for payment of compound interest at a high rate was not sanctioned by the District Judge, the claim for interest cannot be sustained.

The first point taken on behalf of the appellants raises the question of the effect of revocation of a probate or letters of administration, upon which there has been some divergence of judicial opinion. The effect of revocation of a grant of probate or letters of administration has been made to depend mainly upon whether the grant was void *ab initio* or merely voidable. In *Abram* v. *Cunningham*[1] it was decided that where administration is granted on concealment of a will which appointed executors, the grant is void from its commencement, and all acts performed by the administrator in that character are equally void and cannot be made good, even though the executor should afterwards appear and renounce. But in *Peckham's Case*[2] it was held that if the administrator had paid funeral expenses, debts, or legacies, which the law forced the executor to pay, the administrator, in an action against him by the executor, should recoup so much in damages, because he was compelled to pay it, and the true executor had no prejudice by it, for as much as he himself would have been bound to pay it. Again, from *Graysbrook* v. *Fox*[3] it appears that in an action by the true executor against the purchaser of goods sold to him by the administrator, the sale is indefeasible, if made to discharge the funeral expenses or the debts which the administrator or executor was compellable to pay. Where, however, the act in question is one which the administrator was not compellable to do, but is a voluntary act on his part, it has been sometimes said that it is simply void and no title is thereby conferred on a purchaser. [*Hewson* v. *Shelley*[4]] or mortgagee [*Ellis* v. *Ellis*[5]] from him, and the vendor is also liable in damages in an action by the

[1] (1677) 2 Lev. 181.
[2] (1562) 1 Plowden 275.
[3] (1560) cited in Plowden 282.
[4] (1913) W. N. 246.
[5] (1905) 1. Ch. 613.

true executor: *Woolley* v. *Clark*.[1] In *Borall* v. *Borall*,[2] it was held that where the will does not appoint an executor, the repealed grant obtained by suppressing the will is not void *ab initio*, and, therefore, a sale under it was held to be a valid transaction. But wherever the grant of administration is voidable only, as where it has been granted to a party not next of kin, or, where the executor having acted and the Court, not knowing it, committed administration to another, or without citing the necessary parties, all lawful acts done by the first administrator are deemed valid as against the subsequent administrator: *Packman's Case*[3]; *Blackborough* v. *Davis*.[4]

It is worthy of note that the earlier cases to which we have referred were criticised by Lord Redesdale in *Dorle* v. *Blake*,[5] and a view more favourable to the rights of the *bonâ fide* transferee for value without notice has been taken in modern decisions to which we shall now refer. Thus, in *Debendra Nath* v. *Administrator-General*,[6] where the Judicial Committee affirmed the decision of the majority in *Debendra Nath* v. *Administrator-General*,[7] Lord Macnaghten observed that so long as the letters of administration remained unrevoked, the person in whose favour the grant had been made was to all intents and purposes administrator and his receipts were valid discharges for all moneys received by him as administrator. The full significance of this observation is appreciated when it is borne in mind that the letters of administration had been obtained by fraud and by suppression of the fact that the deceased had left a will. A similar view had been previously indicated by Woodroffe, J., in *Gopal Dass* v. *Budree Dass*[8] which may be difficult to reconcile with the *obiter dictum* in *Prayag* v. *Gonkaran*,[9] and was subsequently adopted by Neville, J., in *Craster* v. *Thomas*.[10] It will be observed that in the case last mentioned the administration had been granted, notwithstanding the existence of a will which had been kept back from the Court, and it was thus precisely a case in which it might be argued with plausibility

[1] (1822) 5 B. and Ald. 744; 24 R. R. 546.
[2] (1884) 27 Ch. D. 220.
[3] (1596) 6 Coke 18b.
[4] (1702) 1 P. Wms. 40 (43).
[5] (1804) 2 Sch. and Lef. 231 (237).
[6] (1908) L. R. 35 I.A. 109; I. L. R. 35 Calc. 955.
[7] (1906) I. L. R. 33 Calc. 713.
[8] (1906) I. L. R. 33 Calc. 657.
[9] (1902) 6 C. W. N. 787.
[10] (1909) 2 Ch. 348.

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that the grant was void *ab initio*; yet the Court held that the grant was voidable and not void. Consequently, if the view is maintained that a grant of administration made by a competent Court, though erroneously, is voidable, that is operative till it has been revoked by that Court or set aside by a superior tribunal, there is no room for controversy that the mortgage in suit is binding upon the estate. But even if we take a more restricted view, namely, that adopted by Walsh, J., in *Graysbrook* v. *Fox* [1] the mortgage is clearly indefeasible, because it was created to satisfy a debt of the estate which the executor himself was compellable to pay. The executor had failed to pay the Government revenue due, which had thereupon been satisfied by one of the joint proprietors of the estate. The executor thereafter did not reimburse the co-proprietor, who was consequently constrained to sue and to obtain a decree. Even then the executor did not satisfy the judgment-debt. Execution followed, with the result that a valuable property was sold for an inadequate price. Under these circumstances, the administrators, with the sanction of the District Judge, raised a loan and saved the property which it was their paramount duty to do. They did nothing beyond what it would have been obviously incumbent upon the executor to do for the protection of the estate, if he had been in possession at the time, and we are unable to discover any conceivable principle of justice, equity and good conscience to support the contention that the mortgage was *ab initio* void, because granted by administrators erroneously appointed by the probate Court. It may be added that the more liberal view indicated above has been adopted in the American Courts, where it has been ruled that all acts done by an executor or an administrator in the due and legal course of administration are valid and binding, even though the letters issued by the Court are afterwards revoked or the incumbent discharged from his trust; *Bigelow* v. *Bigelow* [2]; *Foster* v. *Brown* [3]; *Fisher* v. *Bassett*.[4] But reference has been made to a dictum in *Boxall* v. *Boxall* [5] that if a grant is reversed

[1] (1562) 1 Plowden 275.
[2] (1829) 19 Am. Dec. 591; 4 Ohio. 128.
[3] (1828) 19 Am. Dec. 652; 1 Bailey (s. c.) 84.
[4] (1837) 33 Am. Dec. 227; 9 Leigh (Va) 119.
[5] (1884) 27 Ch. D. 220 (224).

by a Court of appeal it must be deemed void *ab initio*, though revocation takes effect only from the time of the recall, and it has been argued that all intermediate acts of the executor or administrator pending an appeal which results in a reversal of the former sentence, are void, because, it is said on the strength of the dictum in *Price* v. *Parker*,[1] the appeal suspends the operation of the former sentence, which on its reversal places all the parties in the position which they would have occupied if it had never existed. This contention does not appear to be well-founded on principle, and cannot, at any rate, be applied to the Indian system of law which explicitly recognises the doctrine that an appeal does not operate as a stay of proceedings under the decree or order challenged by way of appeal (Order 41, Rule 5, of the Civil Procedure Code, 1908). It is worthy of remark that in the Courts of the United States, although in some cases [*State* v. *William*[2]; *Muirhead* v. *Muirhead*[3]] the view has been maintained that an appeal suspends the operation of a decree and leaves the executor or administrator in office as before, there is respectable authority for the contrary opinion that an appeal by an executor from an order revoking probate of the will does not continue the powers of the executor pending the appeal: *Harney* v. *Scott*[4]; *Crozier's Estate*.[5] In *re Marsh*.[6] But the appellants are in a further difficulty in the present case. The executor was actually removed and the administrators were placed in possession long before the appeal was preferred; consequently, there is no room for the application of the doctrine that the appeal suspended the operation of the order for revocation. We may add that in systems where the view is maintained that an appeal against an order of revocation, suspends the operation of the order, practical difficulty in the management of the estate is avoided by the appointment of an administrator *pendente lite*, and plainly no question could arise as to the legality of the mortgage in suit, if the administrators here are deemed to have been in essence at least administrators *pendente lite*. We need not, however, have recourse to what might be called a fiction and, for the reasons previously assigned, we hold that the mortgage granted by the

[1] (1641) 1 Lev. 157.
[2] (1850) 9 Gill. 172.
[3] (1847) 8 Sm. and M. 211.
[4] (1859) 28 Mo. 335.
[5] (1884) 65 Cal. 332; 4 Pac. 109.
[6] (1903) 55 Atl. 290.

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administrators with the sanction of the probate Court bound the estate.

The second point taken on behalf of the appellants raises the question of the validity of the claim for interest. In the application to the District Judge for sanction of the pro mortgage, the principal amount required to be raised was s as Rs. 550, but no mention was made about interest. Whe deed was executed by the administrators, they covenanted, hov ever, to pay compound interest at 30 per cent. per annum with half-yearly rests. Under Section 90 of the Probate and Administration Act, an administrator is authorised to grant a mortgage of the immovable property vested in him, only with the previous permission of the probate Court. This implies a sanction by the Court of all the essential elements of the mortgage transaction, and there is no room for doubt that, from the point of view of the burden imposed on the estate, the provision for payment of interest may be even more effective than the principal amount of the loan required to be raised. See *Ganga Pershad Saku* v. *Maharani Bibi* [1]; *Thakur Prasad* v. *Gauripat Rai* [2] which arose on the corresponding provisions of the Guardians and Wards Act, XL of 1858, Section 18 and VIII of 1890, Section 29. See also *Abhiram Pal* v. *Mukunda Lal Dutt*,[3] *Rai Radha Kissen* v. *Nauratan Lall*,[4] *Nimai Chand Addya* v. *Golam Hossein*.[5] In the case before us, the clause for the payment of compound interest at a high rate was manifestly unreasonable, and the lender obviously made the best of the embarrassing situation in which the administrators found themselves. We accordingly reduce the interest to simple interest at 9 per cent. per annum and we do so partly in view of the fact that the mortgagee has waited till very nearly the last day of the period of limitation, clearly with the object that the claim for interest may reach the maximum possible amount. Such interest as we allow is recoverable from the date of the mortgage and must be added to the mortgage money as was

[1] (1884) L. R. 12 I. A. 47; I. L. R. 11 Calc. 379.
[2] (1908) I. L. R. 30 All. 188.
[3] (1906) 5 C. L. J. 542 (548).
[4] (1907) 6 C. L. J. 490 (521).
[5] (1909) I. L. R. 37 Calc. 179; 11 C. L. J. 317.

done by the Judicial Committee in *Chajjmal* v. *Brij Bhukan*.[1] The decision in *Moti* v. *Ramoharai*[2] is clearly distinguishable, as there was no covenant at all for payment of interest *post diem* in that case, and the amount allowed, though added to the mortgage dues, was treated as damages, a distinction not always recognised: *Godillo* v. *Weguilin*.[3]

The result is that this appeal is allowed in part, the decree of the District Judge discharged, and, in lieu thereof, the usual mortgage decree made in favour of the plaintiff for Rs. 1,502-14-0, namely, Rs. 550 as principal and Rs. 952-14-0 as interest thereon at 9 per cent. per annum from the 21st May, 1895, to the 21st August, 1914, which we fix as the date for redemption. The plaintiff will also be allowed his costs in the Court of first instance on the sum now decreed, such costs to be ascertained in this Court and added to the mortgage dues. If the decretal amount is not paid on or before the 21st August, 1914, it will carry interest at 6 per cent. per annum from that date and the mortgaged property will be sold in due course for realisation thereof. The defendants will not be personally liable for any portion of the decretal amount. Each party will pay his own costs of the appeal to the District Judge as also of the appeal to this Court.

We are informed that the mortgaged property has been sold in execution of the decree now set aside and has been purchased by the decree-holder. The effect of our order will be that the sale will stand annulled from this date, and the property will be re-sold, if occasion arises, in execution of the decree now made: *Set Umedmal* v. *Srinath Ray*[4]; *Chandan Singh* v. *Ramdeni Singh*.[5] We do not, however, now determine what restitution the decree-holder may be liable to make, if he took possession of the property by virtue of his purchase at the sale now cancelled; that question must be determined by the execution Court if an appropriate application is made in that behalf by the party interested: *Raghu Singh* v. *Sheo Protsad*[6]; *Beni Madhe Singh* v. *Pran Singh*.[7]

Appeal allowed in part.

[1] (1895) L. R. 22 I. A. 190; I. L. R. 17 All. 511.
[2] (1897) I. L. R. 24 Calc. 690.
[3] (1877) 5 Ch. D. 287.
[4] (1900) I. L. R. 27 Calc. 810.
[5] (1904) I. L. R. 31. Calc. 499.
[6] (1912) 16 C. L. J. 135.
[7] (1911) 15 C. L. J. 187.

NOTE.

There is a good deal of difference of judicial opinion on the question what is the effect of revocation of a probate or Letters of Administration. On the review of many cases on this subject it has been held in this case that all acts done by an executor or an administrator in the due course of administration are valid and binding, even though the probate or the letters issued by the Court are afterward revoked. Section 90 of the Probate and Administration Act is very important. The sanction of Court under Section 90 of the Probate and Administration Act implies a sanction by the Court of all the essential elements of the mortgage transaction, and from the point of view of the burden imposed on the estate, the provision for payment of interest may be even more effective than the principal amount of the loan required to be raised.